

BULGARIA

Overview: The Government of Bulgaria continued to deport people it considered national security risks, and increased extradition of suspected foreign terrorist fighters from Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government has worked to enhance its terrorism prevention and enforcement tools by criminalizing foreign terrorist fighters, developing a new counterterrorism strategy, enhancing operations of its National Counterterrorism Center, and announcing plans to draft a comprehensive law on measures against terrorism.

The United States and Bulgaria launched a new Bilateral Counterterrorism Working Group to bolster bilateral cooperation. The group members represented different agencies in the Bulgarian government and include the Deputy Minister of Interior, who co-chairs the group, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Counterterrorism Coordinator and representatives of the information services.

Bulgaria is a member of the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and has repeatedly responded to requests for assistance, including in March, when the Ministry of Defense provided weapons and munitions to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region's Peshmerga.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Bulgaria prosecutes terrorism under several general provisions of the Penal Code, which has been amended multiple times since it was first enacted in 1968. In 2015, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Penal Code that provide for the prosecution of individuals, including foreign terrorist fighters, who support, plan, and facilitate the commission of terrorist acts in Bulgaria and abroad.

The Ministry of the Interior (MOI) has operational units responsible for deterring, detecting, and responding to terrorist incidents, including the Specialized Unit for Combating Terrorism, Security Police, and Special Police Forces. The State Agency for National Security (DANS) has intelligence-gathering units responsible for counterterrorism. DANS also houses the National Counterterrorism Center, an interagency coordination body responsible for building a common operating picture of terrorist threats. Specialized law enforcement units are generally well-equipped and supported with relevant training, but the focus has been primarily in Sofia, and they lack resources in other regional centers. As of July, the specialized court for organized crime and its prosecutors' office received jurisdiction to prosecute and try all terrorist cases in the country. The court personnel do not have expertise in handling these types of cases, however.

After the November terrorist attacks in Paris, Bulgaria tightened its border control rules and screened all travelers at the border crossings. Within the EU, Bulgaria shares Advanced Passenger Information appearing on the biographical data page of passports. Based on bilateral police cooperation agreements, Bulgaria also shares this type of information with non-EU countries for law enforcement purposes on an as-needed basis. Bulgaria was in the process of establishing a Passenger Information Unit (PIU) that will collect and share the data an airline receives from a traveler to book and manage travel. At year's end, legislation was pending in the National Assembly that would require air carriers to provide data to the PIU. The Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program supported Bulgarian participation in a series of border security-related courses aimed at addressing foreign terrorist fighter travel.

Law enforcement cooperation between U.S. agencies and their Bulgarian counterparts has been historically strong. However, consecutive structural changes and reorganization of key police units, and the resulting reassignment of personnel and imposition of new rules, slowed joint casework and harmed law enforcement morale.

U.S. government agencies continued to work closely with Bulgarian counterparts through a variety of counterterrorism programs aimed at enhancing Bulgaria's capacity and capabilities. The Department of State partnered with Bulgaria to implement key programs in the areas of border security, aviation security, and interagency cooperation. In October and December, Bulgarian legal and investigative experts participated in workshops on countering Hizballah's terrorist and criminal activities.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Bulgaria belongs to the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism, a Financial Task Force-style regional body. Bulgaria's Financial Intelligence Directorate (FID) of DANS has primary responsibility for anti-money laundering measures for all reporting entities and is a member of the Egmont Group. The Bulgarian National Bank also has a Special Supervision Directorate to investigate banks for compliance with money laundering and terrorism financing requirements.

The government did not freeze, seize, or forfeit any terrorism-related assets in 2015. However, it did identify some funds as potentially terrorism-related and further investigation is underway.

Bulgaria criminalizes terrorism financing in accordance with international standards. Since there is no publicly available information on terrorist-related assets frozen or seized, it is hard to assess the effectiveness of Bulgaria's process. Thirty-one reporting entities, including banks, real estate brokers, and financial and exchange houses, are required to file regularly with FID currency transaction reports for all transactions valued at more than US \$17,000. There are penalties for non-compliance (administrative sanctions), and enforcement is generally good. Bulgaria requires the collection of Know Your Customer data for wire transfers. All NGOs are obliged to report suspicious transactions.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2016 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Countering Violent Extremism: On December 30, a new government strategy and action plan on countering radicalization to violence and terrorism were approved by the Council of Ministers. The strategy aims to strengthen existing government counterterrorism efforts by involving all possible agencies and by optimizing interagency coordination. The strategy spells out mechanisms for improved cooperation with civil society, business organizations, local communities, and religious leaders.

The Grand Mufti of Bulgaria issued a statement with the National Council of Religious Communities in Bulgaria condemning the Paris attacks in January and November. The Grand Mufti has been a voice of tolerance and moderation, and has stressed that government efforts must complement community CVE efforts.

According to Bulgaria's draft action plan on the strategy on countering radicalization and terrorism, the government will have a national program by 2020 for members of violent extremist groups to disengage, de-radicalize, and be rehabilitated.

International and Regional Cooperation: Bulgaria is a member of and active contributor to counterterrorism initiatives at the UN, EU, NATO, Council of Europe, OSCE, and Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation.